World Chronicle

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U.N. YEAR IN REVIEW 1999

As humanity stands on the brink of a new millennium, what will the future bring to the world population? In 1999, the human family reached the six billion mark. It was a year marked by conflict and natural disasters. This special edition of World Chronicle features a 15-minute video, 1999 Year in Review, showing the year's major events as seen from a United Nations perspective and Fred Eckhard, Spokesman for the Secretary-General, comments on the year's main issues and discusses the challenges that the world organization will face in the future.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues.

Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

In 1999 the world's population reached the 6 billion mark. It was a year marked by conflict and natural disasters. From Kosovo to East Timor, from Colombia to Sierra Leone, civilians have paid a heavy price in bloody civil wars all over the world. But 1999 was also a year of hope. A new awareness about the dangers of small arms began to surface on the international stage. The United Nations has placed special emphasis in helping in the development of Africa and on human rights. Looking forward to the new millennium, do we see a bright future for the world population or can we expect more war, hunger and poverty?

This special edition of **World Chronicle** features a 15-minute video of the major events from 1999 as seen from a United Nations perspective and Fred Eckhard, Spokesman for the Secretary-General, who comments on the year's main issues.

RUN VIDEO

NARRATOR: Nineteen ninety-nine. Sarajevo. Bosnia. The human family becomes six thousand million strong. A new-born boy, Adnan Mevic, is chosen to symbolize this historic milestone. Among his first visitors, U.N. Secretary-General, Kofi Annan.

ANNAN: The birth of Sarajevo's baby, six billion, will resonate far beyond this city, or country, or region.

NARRATOR: But what kind of a year had young Adnan arrived in? And what have been some of the highlights for the United Nations in 1999 -- the year we became six billion and stand on the brink of a new Millennium?

UN Headquarters, New York. New flags are raised during the year. The South Pacific nations of Tonga, Nauru and Kiribati join to bring membership to 188 nations, reinforcing the universality of the world organization. Appropriately, these three new members are small island states. They're a category of countries to which the General Assembly devoted a special Session in 1999. Far flung and fragile, island communities especially are examples of how global problems require global solutions. For islands are the first threatened by humanity's impact on our shared environment. One warning sign, for islands and costal areas alike .... are more frequent and severe storms, such as the deadly cyclone in India in 1999. Whether caused by climate change, or civil conflicts, the need for better preparation for humanitarian emergencies was a special theme in the Secretary-General's annual report.

Even as the world becomes aware of these new problems, the ancient scourge of war continued to afflict us in 1999. For it was a year when armed conflict and its aftermath – in Kosovo and elsewhere – reminded us that we are looking back at a century more violent than any before it. Seeking to prevent wars, yet helping the victims, remains as central a task as ever to the United Nations, and as daunting.

Around Kosovo, UN agencies assisted hundreds of thousands of refugees, victims of ethnic cleansing. They had joined, temporarily, the 50 million men, women and children around the world who fled their homes to eke out an existence, relying largely on international assistance.

And when the war ended, UN agencies were in Kosovo too, to begin the rebuilding of the shattered province ... from helping Kosovars prepare for the winter ... to training a new police force ... to clearing mines and assisting farmers getting ready for the next planting season.

On the other side of the world, East Timor. In 1999, the United Nations supervised a consultation process to determine whether this former Portuguese colony wished to retain its connection with Indonesia. But no sooner had a clear majority indicated their preference for independence, an anti-independence militia went on a rampage. The International Community responded. As the year ended, a 7,000 strong Security Council-approved multinational force, has established itself in the territory. The United Nations has been given the job of supervising the transition to eventual independence.

At the end of 1999, the United Nations had 17 peacekeeping missions in the field. But it is also taking on the complex and multidimensional job of helping nations recover from conflict. As in Mozambique, where the UN's Deputy Secretary-General, Louise Frechette, was on hand to inspect the nation's new police force. Here and elsewhere, the UN is aiding countries that have moved beyond the peacekeeping stage and are getting back on their feet after devastating civil wars.

And in Albania, arms looted from army depots two years ago, led to a new type of UN system initiative. Communities menaced by weapons in civilian hands, exchange the guns in return for better roads and telecommunications. It's the initial response to the plague of small arms that threatens many societies. An Albanian student speaks from the heart.

ALBANIA GIRL: If we want to do something for our future, we must not have Kalashnikovs because they kill our life, they kill our future and we are the youth of this city.

NARRATOR: Arms for Development. A project to help Albania move towards normalcy.

1999. As we await the new millennium, young Adnan Mevic is greeted by a world where civilians are increasingly targets in many brutal civil wars.

In Sierra Leone, children – including babies – were deliberately and gruesomely mutilated by rebels. For the first time the UN's new peacekeeping mission there includes child protection officers specifically tasked to help children.

In some 30 civil conflicts around the globe, girls and boys have been forced to fight. Torn from their families, abused and neglected, they are involuntary foot soldiers in wars they barely comprehend ... and many hundreds and thousands of children have been subjected to this degrading fate. From a rehabilitation centre in Sierra Leone, the UN's Olara Otunnu spoke for all ...

OTUNNU: The only place where young people like you should be is with your families and in the classroom learning to read, learning to be a nurse, to be a teacher ....

NARRATOR: A family, a home, security, a future. Rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which marked its 10th Anniversary in 1999. For human rights were very much at the forefront of United Nations concerns during the year.

Soldiers of the French Foreign Legion investigate a mass grave in Kosovo. Some 500 such sites have been identified. The evidence will be used for possible prosecutions at the International War Crimes Tribunal. But all too often it confirms what relatives had most feared. Proof positive of the death of a loved one .... Kosovo was yet another wake-up call, says UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan.

ANNAN: It has revealed the core challenge to the Security Council and to the United Nations as a whole in the next century: to forge unity behind the principle that massive and systematic violations of human rights – wherever they may take place – should not be allowed to stand.

NARRATOR: The cause of human rights, increasingly captures the imagination of ordinary people. In Colombia, the UN Development Programme is helping community radio stations that support peace and strive for balance and objectivity.

In 1999, more than ten million Colombians marched to urge an end to a conflict which claimed 30,000 lives over the past 10 years. The cry for justice and human rights, here and elsewhere, does not go unheeded. Work continued at the United Nations in 1999 to flesh out the outline of a permanent International Criminal Court.

Our six billionth baby will grow up in a world where grinding poverty is the fate for whole populations. But, paradoxically, where ensuring schooling is not beyond our means. UNICEF's Executive-Directory, Carol Bellamy.

BELLAMY: And for seven billion dollars annually over the next 10 years, that's less than western Europeans spend on ice cream or Americans spend on cosmetics, every child can get an education.

NARRATOR: To rally support among young people for global action against poverty, an ambitious call to action was launched on the Internet during the year. At the click of a computer mouse, major world figures inaugurated "Netaid". One of the most complex websites yet created; it's supported by UN agencies and an American computer company. It featured pop concerts on two continents and already millions of people have logged on from all over the world. Launching Netaid, Kofi Annan described the world that all too many children will experience.

ANNAN: Nearly half of them will have to survive on two dollars a day or less. Can you imagine what that means? How many children unable to go to school, how many without clean water to drink, how many with nowhere to sleep, how many crying because they are hungry, how many dying of diseases caused by malnutrition?

NARRATOR: For development – fighting poverty continued to be a core goal of the UN and its agencies in 1999. In Syria, for example, where women Palestinian refugees are learning marketable skills with help from the UN Relief and Works Agency.

And in Mozambique, the UN Children's Fund, UNICEF, supports mother and child care. Also during the year, the cause of women was advanced as increasing numbers of countries agreed that women could take cases of discrimination directly to a UN oversight committee.

It was across Africa where the UN most particularly focused its develoment effort. Helping support a mobile museum in Botswana – a museum in a box – brings history and culture to classrooms throughout the country.

In Madagascar, making possible school meals through the World Food Programme. It's both an incentive for students to come to classes and a much-needed supplement to otherwise impoverished diets.

At a special meeting of the Security Council to consider Africa, Kofi Annan called for the talents of business, community groups and governments to come together to tap the Continent's potential.

ANNAN: By combining African efforts with those of the International Community, we can give the cause of peace and development in Africa decisive momentum. Afro-Pessimism is a dead-end. Africa-fatigue is an affront to the very idea of a responsible International Community.

NARRATOR: our six billionth baby will be growing up in a world that faces an unprecedented phenomenon -- finding a role for older people. It's an issue that takes different forms in different societies.

In Uganda, it means grandparents taking over the upbringing of their grandchildren -- the parents have been lost to the AIDS epidemic. World-wide nearly 35 million people are infected with the HIV/AIDS virus.

And in Japan, a very different dilemma. The "greying" of the population has led to the nation having the highest proportion of older people anywhere -- and with this development the need for special facilities to enable them to continue to play an active community role.

In New York, the Cuban Buena Vista Orchestra performed at the UN -- older musicians who are keeping alive the music of their youth ... marking the International Year of Older Persons that was celebrated by the UN in 1999.

The prevailing theme during the year was reaching out to new constituencies, to people in all walks of life -- from business, to voluntary organizations to community groups.

Just such a partnership was forged in 1999 between the UN and the International Football Federation, FIFA -- represented by the Brazilian star, Pele. The aim, to use football as a vehicle to fight for equality of opportunity and against racism and discrimination.

While UN continued to struggle with a budget crisis, its worldwide responsibilities continued to take a tragic human toll on the Organization. More than 20 UN and humanitarian workers died in a plane crash in Kosovo towards the end of the year. And UN staff in Burundi and Kosovo were brutally murdered in 1999 while carrying out their duties. Deputy Secretary-General Louise Frechette, speaking to the General Assembly.

FRECHETTE: You, the Member States, bear primary responsibility for ensuring the security of United Nations staff. Here are some measures you can take. First, you can conduct vigorous investigations into all such killing and incidents, prosecuting those responsible to the full extent of the law.

NARRATOR: As we bid farewell to an old century and usher in a new one, what vision confronts us? Is it a future of peace and prosperity for all, where technology and commerce are harnessed to the common good? Or is it a divided planet where literally billions of people live in absolute poverty.

These are choices before us in the new Millennium.

1999 for the United Nations, the year tiny Adnan Mevic brought our numbers to six billion.

LITTLEJOHNS: This is a special edition of **World Chronicle**. Our guest is Fred Eckhard, Spokesman for the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Fred, the UN is at the dawn of a new millennium, hanging in there. Let's have a few thoughts from you on the political situation that the UN finds itself in at this time. When NATO bypassed the Security Council in bombing Yugoslavia over the treatment of the Kosovars there was criticism that UN has been marginalized. Would you like to comment on the outcome of that?

ECKHARD: Oh there was that criticism but it didn't last long, did it? The members of NATO came back to the Security Council and asked the UN to run a mission in Kosovo, probably the most complex mission we have ever undertaken, in cooperation with the European Union and the OSCE to bring it to substantial autonomy and without defining for us what that means. So we're in Kosovo now with police troop civilians up to our eyeballs in a very complex rebuilding effort and really feels like we're back in the swing because immediately after that came East Timor. After 24 years there was a sudden change in Jakarta, Indonesia. They said, let's put the future of East Timor to a vote. The people voted for independence and now we're in there actually being the government of East Timor. Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of the Congo, possibly soon Ethiopia, Eritrea -- so it's also a year when we saw peacekeeping on the rebound. We started the year with this sense of insecurity that somehow we have been marginalized and then suddenly everything changed and we're in the peacekeeping business for good, it seems -- seventeen missions now.

LITTLEJOHNS: Now as far as peacekeeping is concerned, Fred. Kofi Annan ran to quite a bit of flack when he suggested that the UN should intervene in situations where there is gross violations of human rights and that sovereignty should be over-ridden in such circumstances. A lot of people speaking in the UN General Assembly, foreign ministries, etc. were not too happy about that. How does that look?

ECKHARD: Well, what he said was that, first sovereignty should not protect governments that are committing gross violations of human rights. That the Charter talk about defence of individuals and he said, "but you the governments have to decide who should intervene and when so that it does not seem *ad hoc* so that we are consistent". So he gave the problem back to them to come up with a consistent policy and, of course, there were immediate doubters, the President of Algeria has said, "is this a policy just for the weak?" And that question is in our ears now as governments debate what to do about Russia's handling of their own internal Chechnya problem. So, the question is still on the table.

LITTLEJOHNS: The Secretary-General has no intention of backing off on this?

ECKHARD: No, I think it's a matter of principle for him. I think he senses that governments in general are thinking in this direction but he sees the problem for the credibility of the United Nations if intervention is not carried out in an impartial way according to some criteria. He just asked them what are the criteria?

LITTLEJOHNS: Now more than any of his predecessors, he has reached out to the business community, to private industry, the circle of private sector, and there was the Davos Initiative in Davos, Switzerland at the economic forum there. Can you tell us something about how that is looking?

ECKHARD: He has gone to Davos in January of each of the last three years and he has cultivated a relationship with business which is saying we're in the same business. We want to see an improvement in the world situation to the extent that economic development advances, your profits go up and people are better off. Let's work together.

LITTLEJOHNS: Are they responding positively.

ECKHARD: Well, this year, he took a specific initiative. He said, "why don't you work into your company manual, if you will, a policy on environmental standards, labour standards, and human rights." And he gave them a website to facilitate their communications with the three UN agencies that specialize in these areas. And the response has been very positive. It's been growing each year.

LITTLEJOHNS: On the financial side, the UN had a pretty good news when the Congress finally made an appropriation close to a billion dollars. But as far as I know, the cheque is not yet in the mail. Is the UN getting out of that financial hole?

ECKHARD: Well, we have to see exactly how much money comes through. As you know, the US owes a billion-and-a-half and of that money that ...

LITTLEJOHNS: That's what you say. That's not what the United States says.

ECKHARD: Well, there's only one authoritative figure and that's the one that is set by the General Assembly. Individual governments might complain about how it was done, but it was done fairly and by a system that all Member States agreed to, including the United States. This would be paid out over three years, this billion dollars, and the conditions on it are really horrific. Ambassador Holbrooke has to come back here and convince 187 other Member States, for example among other things, that this payment is acceptable as payment in full of all US arrears. In other words, to give the US a write-off on a portion of its debt. So he has his work cut out for him and we will have to see what ...

LITTLEJOHNS: And the Committee on Contributions is going to have to salt the

other Member States for more money if the United States' contribution is substantially reduced.

ECKHARD: Well, another condition as you have just alluded to is that the US share of the total should be reduced both for peacekeeping and the regular budget. And that's another negotiating job for Ambassador Holbrooke.

LITTLEJOHNS: I remember when Ambassador Holbrooke said that reform was his number one priority and we have heard a lot about UN reform over the years, not only the current Secretary-General but the previous one, Boutros Boutros-Ghali were under pressure to do all kinds of things within the Secretariat to change the system in various ways. How is that coming along?

ECKHARD: Well, those of you with deep memory will recall that the first reform agenda was approved by the General Assembly in 1986 and among the other things it called for was a reduction, I believe, of something like 15 percent of the staff of the UN. In the years since 1986, the reduction in staff, in fact, is closer to 25 percent. But what is your measure of reform and of success in this area? I would watch in the coming year, the Secretary-General's initiative on personnel policies. These are deep-rooted conventions that the Secretary-General would like to see changed, loosened up, so that we can attract the kinds of people we will need for the next century. We are the staff – the staff is the heart of the Organization. Other things -- he proposed a development account. The Assembly debated that for almost three years. In the end, they adopted it this year, pretty much as he proposed it. This is that: "any money saved from efficiencies can be put in an account and used for development purposes". So the reform is moving ahead much more quietly now because it's less in the news but it still has momentum, I sense, and some of the biggest issues are still before us.

LITTLEJOHNS: But as you say, some of the biggest issues stood before you, but hasn't it gotten about as far as it could go? I mean, you're squeezing the oranges until the pip squeak practically, doesn't it? I mean, you are a member of the Secretariat Staff. Aren't you guys a bit worried about this constant harping on reform, cutting back on personnel, etc.?

ECKHARD: Well, he said from the beginning that at some point, he would need some additional resources and he would have to redeploy some people to meet the fresh challenges – the new challenges -- the Organization faces and from the beginning, he always said that there are things I can do under my own authority, and there are things to be done that the governments will have to do. One of the biggest of those, of course, was reform of the Security Council. We've seen a lot of steerings among the ten members of the Council

who are not permanent members. Certain tensions between them and the permanent members but I don't think – yet, they're in a position to come to agree on a formula for reform of the Council, although they all agree it should be done.

LITTLEJOHNS: So things in that area don't look very promising.

ECKHARD: On that specific point. I think it will happen eventually, it has to.

LITTLEJOHNS: Mr. Eckhard, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**. Our guest has been Fred Eckhard, Spokesman for the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle.**

ANNOUNCER: Transcripts of the programme may be obtained free of charge by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to **World Chronicle**, United Nations, Room S-827, New York, N.Y., 10017.

World Chronicle is broadcast worldwide and features guests whose work is concerned with major global issues. This programme is a Public Affairs Presentation of this station from United Nations Radio and Television.